

Domestic Violence Death Review Committee

On January 30, 2026, the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee provided the Minister of Justice with a review report. The report includes the following advice and recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO PREVENTING A SIMILAR DEATH IN THE FUTURE

The quality and level of services provided to survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence by government and non-governmental organizations alike are too variable across the province. In particular, we note that the services delivered in rural Nova Scotia are not nearly as comprehensive as those provided in urban areas.

The Committee acknowledges that there are many examples of excellence in service to survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence across the province. However, there are no formal mechanisms for knowledge sharing in this sector, and therefore these pockets remain localized, where alternatively they could be made standard. In addition, the services can be difficult to navigate even for people working within these systems, and even more so for those experiencing violence. Survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence should be able to easily obtain information about what services are available to them, where they are available, and how to access these services.

The Committee notes that there is existing, ongoing work being done by the Status of Women Office, the Gender Based Violence Division of the Department of Justice, Education and Early Childhood Development, and Labour, Skills, and Immigration regarding development of curricula to address violence. The actions following from these recommendations should complement these initiatives.

Recommendation to promote consistency and effectiveness in programs and services across the province

- 1. Explore creating a permanent forum to facilitate the ongoing exchange of leading practices, innovative ideas, and current research, both nationally and internationally, to promote consistency and effectiveness in programs and services across the province. This forum must also ensure that a strong cultural lens and cross sectoral representation is embedded throughout.**

Recommendation to support enhanced curricula related to gender-based violence for all educators

- 2. Explore working with the province's universities and colleges to implement programs and curricula specific to gender-based violence for all educators, with an emphasis on Early Childhood Educators and Elementary School Teachers.**

This recommendation will support the government's response to the (MCC) recommendation C17. This recommendation aligns with other recommendations, like those made by the MCC Inquiry (V2, V7, V14c, V16b, C14b, C32c, P74); the Desmond Fatality Inquiry (recommendations 11 and 12); and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) (7.9, 18.1, 18.6).

The programs and curricula should focus on teaching educators how to teach children and youth empathy, openness, and compassion; how to deconstruct unhealthy gender norms; and how to promote help-seeking, help-giving, and healthy relationships (with self, friends, family, and romantic interests).

When people learn to empathize with others, it helps break down harmful societal norms regarding gender and makes abusive behavior less acceptable. Teaching empathy promotes respect in relationship and encourages people to see how violence hurts victims. By starting this early, especially in daycares, schools and communities, we can challenge the attitudes and power imbalances which can lead to domestic violence. This helps build healthier, more respectful interactions, reducing the risk of gender-based violence.

Recommendation to support enhanced access to mental health services in elementary schools

3. Explore access to mental health services in all schools, including elementary level, to ensure all children and families have access to mental health supports at the earliest opportunity to prevent the escalation of behavior that leads to violence.

This recommendation aligns with other recommendations, like those made by the MCC Inquiry (V2, V7, V9b, V15, V16b, C1a, C14b, C32c); the Desmond Fatality Inquiry (recommendation 12); and the MMIWG calls to justice (1.1, 1.6, 3.1, 3.4, 7.2, 12.5).

Pediatric mental health care is health care. Children who witness (or experience) gender-based violence are more susceptible to perpetrating or experiencing gender-based violence as adults. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a rise in mental health conditions in children like anxiety and depression. Children and their parents across Nova Scotia need access to comprehensive and timely mental health services to prevent escalation into unhealthy or violent behavior. IWK's central physical location in HRM can prevent families in rural areas from accessing necessary care for their children.

Recommendation to support enhanced housing supports for victims of gender-based violence, including integrated access to wraparound services

4. Continue supports for the expansion and enhancement of the provincial housing strategy to build and support affordable housing initiatives, including Second Stage Housing for victims of gender-based violence. It is imperative that this housing provides integrated access to wraparound services in all new and existing housing developments, including in rural areas.

This recommendation aligns with other recommendations, like those made by the MCC Inquiry (V2, V7, V8c, V9, V15, V16, C1, C14); and the MMIWG calls to justice (1.6, 2.4, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 7.2, 4.3, 5.6).

Increased housing options that provide integrated access to wraparound services are critical for those experiencing gender-based violence. Several government departments and community organizations are engaged in this work (e.g., Status of Women Office, Department of Growth and Development, Department of Opportunities and Social Development, and community organizations like Transition Houses, Mi'kmaw Healing Centres, Adsum House, Alice House, GuysWork, YWCA, the Elizabeth Fry Society, the John Howard Society, 902 Man Up, and Wabanaki Two-Spirit are all involved in housing).

Stable housing offers a secure environment, reducing stress and instability that can contribute to abusive behavior. Access to healthcare is also critical. When individuals and families have access to comprehensive healthcare, they can address physical and mental health issues, which often underlie violence. In addition, life skills training equips people with the tools to manage conflicts, communicate effectively, and build healthy relationships. By addressing these fundamental needs and providing support, we can create a foundation for safer, more stable communities where the risk of violence is significantly lowered.

Recommendation to support service providers in their delivery of services to victims and survivors

- 5. Explore establishing a provincial mobile response team dedicated to assisting service providers in their delivery of wrap around services and responses to domestic and intimate partner violence. The provincial team would provide trauma-informed, culturally sensitive support. The team should be multidisciplinary and include practitioners from a variety of backgrounds.**

This recommendation aligns with other recommendations, like those made by the MCC Inquiry (V2, V7, V8, V9, V15, V16, C1, C14, C32, P73, P75); the Desmond Fatality Inquiry (recommendations 10, 11, 12, 13, 14); the MMIWG calls to justice (1.6, 1.8, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 7.2, 5.6, 9.7); and the report, Defunding the Police: Defining the Way Forward for HRM.

This is an important step to further support safety efforts by building relationships between police and local community. When there is no threat of criminal intervention, there is a desire for less reliance on police for mental health and family crisis intervention, as these areas fall outside the expertise of policing. This recommendation aims to create a community-based, trauma-informed, and culturally aware approach to preventing and responding to gender-based violence, especially intimate partner and family violence. There are many times when access to in-person, expert violence intervention and prevention supports will lead to de-escalation of violence in the home, especially where criminal charges are not applicable. Even when charges are laid, having quick and ready access to supports for victims and perpetrators can prevent repetition of the violence.

Recommendation to support men's organizations in their delivery of violence prevention services

- 6. Explore the creation of a provincial umbrella organization for men-intervention and men-serving groups that supports mentorship, men's health, community engagement, and anti-isolation initiatives for male (or male-identifying) victims and for men who cause harm.**

Domestic violence and intimate partner violence cannot be addressed without engaging boys and men. Men's organizations across the province that are doing important prevention work in this area must be engaged. An entity with experience in supporting survivors, delivering public education, and building community partnerships would be well positioned to complement men's programs. Strong connections with justice, health, and community organizations would enable integrated services, while expertise in training and advocacy could help standardize program delivery. This approach would reduce duplication, improve access in rural areas, and strengthen education, accountability, and prevention efforts province wide.

The provincial association could focus on the following initiatives:

Healthy Relationships – Delivering education programs and campaigns on respect, communication, and equality to promote healthy relationship skills.

Anger Management – Integrating counselling and group sessions to teach emotional regulation and non-violent coping strategies.

Challenging Misogyny – Addressing harmful gender norms and beliefs that devalue women through training and awareness initiatives.

Removing Victim-Blaming – Developing curriculum and facilitator training that emphasizes accountability and responsibility for behavior.

Men's Support Groups – Establishing and coordinating peer groups focused on healthy masculinity and positive behavior change.

Sustainable Funding – Advocating for and managing provincial and federal funds to ensure long-term stability of men's programs.

Coordination of Services – Working with member agencies to ensure that men's programs and services are more standardized across the province.